



# The Executive Branch

By Phyllis Naegeli

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The constitution granted specific powers to the president to run our country. However, it did not detail the actual support departments that the president would need. With the words, "he may require the Opinion, in writing, of the principal Officer in each of the executive Departments" the Founding Fathers left the task of establishing the remainder of the executive branch to the newly formed government. In 1789, Congress created the Department of State and the Department of the Treasury. As the country grew, Congress and the president worked together to create more departments to handle the growing tasks of our government. Today, the executive branch includes the president, the vice-president, the cabinet departments, the White House Office, and many independent agencies and government corporations to implement the laws made by Congress.

Article II of the constitution created the position of vice-president; however, it did not clearly define the job. Only two tasks were granted to the vice-president. The most important is to be ready to take over should the president become ill or die. The vice-president is also president of the Senate. As important as that sounds, the powers of the job are rarely exercised. As president of the Senate, the vice-president casts a deciding vote when there is a tie. As the years have passed, the job of vice-president has taken on greater importance. Today, the person holding this office is a trusted advisor to the president, is on the National Security Council, is a part of the cabinet, and attends to many ceremonial tasks the president is unable to perform.

The president appoints cabinet department leaders and the Senate approves them. The leaders of the cabinet departments are called secretaries with the exception of the Department of Justice whose leader is the Attorney General. Secretaries meet with the president on a regular basis to give advice and assist with policy-making decisions. However, it is rare to have the entire cabinet together at one time. Whenever this happens, it is usually for ceremonial reasons.

When a situation arises where cabinet department responsibilities overlap, the president will meet with more than one secretary. For example, the president meets regularly with the National Security Council. In these meetings, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Treasury, the Secretary of Treasury meet with the president, the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, and the Vice-President to discuss foreign policy and national security issues.

The White House Office is made up of the close personal staff chosen by the president, without congressional approval. The Chief of Staff, who is the most influential person here, leads this office. The employees in the White House Office write speeches; advise the president on the economy, budget, trade, and policy; lobby Congress; handle the media; and perform the day-to-day household duties necessary to run the president's home.

In addition, the executive branch is also the home of many independent agencies and government corporations. These divisions of the government take care of special tasks not covered by other departments. Congress and the president have control over these agencies. There are three different types of independent agencies. The first are Independent Regulatory Commissions that set rules for large industries that concern the public, such as airlines. They also watch over business to prevent unfair labor practices and unfair competition. The second type are government corporations such as the U. S. Postal Service and Amtrak. The final group of agencies includes NASA, the CIA, and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

The government may seem to be a huge, distant, legislative body that does not care about us. However, the very purpose of our government is to care for us and keep us safe. For example, the Energy Department - a part of the cabinet - makes sure we have gas, oil, and power every day. The Council on Environmental Quality, an independent agency, advises the president on ways to keep our air, water, and land clean and safe. These and many other agencies work to make our lives better.

Name \_\_\_\_\_



Date \_\_\_\_\_

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### Questions

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- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. The constitution specifically outlined the jobs of the president, vice-president, fifteen cabinet departments, and independent agencies.
- A. true
  - B. false
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. The leader of a cabinet department is called a/an \_\_\_\_\_.
- A. secretary
  - B. executive officer
  - C. deputy
  - D. security officer
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Which of the following cabinet departments was created by Congress in 1789?
- A. the Department of the Interior
  - B. the Department of State
  - C. the Department of Defense
  - D. the Department of Homeland Security
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. The president meets with the entire cabinet on a daily basis to discuss national policy.
- A. false
  - B. true
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. How many cabinet departments are there in the executive branch today?
- A. fifteen
  - B. ten
  - C. twelve
  - D. fifty
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. The most important job of the vice-president is to \_\_\_\_\_.?
- A. take over if the president becomes ill or dies
  - B. be a member of the National Security Council
  - C. perform ceremonial duties for the president
  - D. be president of the Senate
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Which part of the executive branch is responsible for keeping the White House clean?
- A. the White House Office
  - B. the Council on Environmental Quality
  - C. the Department of State
  - D. the Vice-President
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Which of the following is a government corporation?
- A. The Environmental Protection Agency
  - B. The Department of Defense
  - C. The Office of Administration
  - D. The U.S. Postal Service



Date \_\_\_\_\_

[illegible][illegible]



**What is the role of the vice-president? Would you want to be vice-president? Why or why not?**

[illegible]